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Dialogue among civilizations

Letter dated 6 January 1999 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the Declaration of Athens, entitled "The heritage of ancient civilizations: Implications for the modern world". The Declaration was signed by representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Egypt, Italy and Greece at the European Cultural Centre at Delphi, Greece, on 11 November 1998. I should like to add that in our perspective, the discussion on the item "Dialogue among civilizations" is not merely confined to the four signatories of the above Declaration, it is inclusive of all ancient and modern civilizations.

I should be grateful if you could have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly under the item entitled "Dialogue among civilizations".

(*Signed*) Hadi Nejad **Hosseinian**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Declaration of Athens

The heritage of ancient civilizations: Implications for the modern world

At the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, representatives of Egypt, Greece, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Italy gathered at Athens, at the European Cultural Centre at Delphi, Greece, on 11 November 1998, for a discussion on "The heritage of ancient civilizations: Implications for the modern world" at the dawn of the new millennium, an idea first proposed by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to further develop peace and mutual understanding among all peoples on Earth.

After considering the different issues directly related to the interaction among civilizations, the panel of experts has agreed on the relevance of mutual understanding and the exchange of knowledge to the cause of justice and peace in the world order.

The participants wish to express their appreciation for the initiative in view of the difficulties of ethnic strife and other aspects of political, religious and social intolerance being faced at present by many countries. The participants wish to confirm their refusal of theories that advocate confrontation, conflict and inequality based on the presumed superiority of any people, in the present as well as in the past. Civilizations are the product of many people working together over long periods of time. The more that scientific research penetrates the formative processes of all the great civilizations, the more the complex web of interactions that made them possible are revealed. Beyond military conquests and declarations of supremacy, we can see a hidden pattern of diversity and tolerance that ultimately laid the foundations for each new synthesis. The civilizations of Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Greece and ancient Italy developed between the third and first millennia B.C. as constructions realized by the joint efforts of many different peoples, which, often through interaction, contributed to humanity's progress. The participants confirm their conviction in and recognition of pluralism in all civilizations in the framework of mutual respect and peace.

For these reasons there is no substitute for a continuous dialogue among civilizations based on equality and mutual respect. Our target should be the elevation of human experience and knowledge based on respect for individuality and diversity. Dialogue among civilizations contributes to human progress. Mankind has a long way to go and we cannot fail to save every expression of humanity through time.

The participants at the Athens meeting have agreed that, in consideration of the complexities of the historical problems involved, a number of different meetings and events should be planned over the next two years. The participants support a strategy of extending the debate from the panel of experts to a wider public by organizing a number of seminars to bring different facts and opinions together within a single perspective. In 1999, a preparatory meeting in April and a major seminar in October should be organized to gather a number of highly qualified specialists to present the specific characters, the formative processes, the state of knowledge and the diffusion of each civilization. The papers presented should be published and circulated immediately after the conclusion of the meetings. These texts will form the basis for future development of the collaboration. The organization of a major international conference, to be held in the year 2000, where the discussion could focus more concretely on the second aspect of our programme, "Implications for the modern world", could be planned.

Since the General Assembly of the United Nations has dedicated the year 2001 to the dialogue among civilizations, the participants of the Athens panel hereby propose that the programme of events concerning the heritage of ancient civilizations should be largely directed towards producing significant results before the major events of that year. For this purpose, the representatives of the four countries have agreed to direct any further deliberations to their respective Governments.

Egypt

(*Signed*) Mohamed E. Khalil,
Ambassador of Egypt to Greece

(*Signed*) Ambassador Nabil Badr,
Adviser to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece

(*Signed*) Professor Vassilis Karasmanis,
Director of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi

(*Signed*) Ambassador Apostolos Anninos,
Director of Cultural Affairs, M.F.A.

Islamic Republic of Iran

(*Signed*) Mahdi Khandaghabadi,
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Greece

(*Signed*) Ambassador Gholam Ali Khoshroo,
Adviser to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Italy

(*Signed*) Professor Maurizio Tosi,
Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente,
Rome